Essays in Philosophy

Volume 16
Issue 1 *Philosophy of Democracy*

Article 6

January 2015

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Abstract

Democracy in the 21st century is exhibiting some radical discontinuities in terms of its forms and institutions and needs to be rethought, if we wish to have a sustainable future. Democracy increasingly will be shaped by three realities: the demise of the nation state; the failure of representational liberal democracy; and the radical impacts of resource insufficiency and climate change. Yet if no government, however tyrannical, survives for long except by consent of the people, then that consent can serve as the starting point for rethinking what is meant by "democracy." Three terms are offered as functional categories that allow for an assessment of democratic forms and institutions: subsistence, operational and systemic. Each describes how and why the population acquiesces to governance and under what conditions.

Essays Philos (2015)16:70-88 | DOI: 10.7710/1526-0569.1522

Published online: 27 January 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the aftermath of Arab Spring in Egypt, the eventual eviction of the Occupy Movement, and dismal recent voter turnout in Western countries

(especially Canada and the United States), the reader would understandably expect the title of this essay to foreshadow some discussion of the demise of democracy. All these indicators, combined with various forms of extremism, could easily be read as signs that 21st century democracy will be either be frail or short-lived.

Such is not the case, nor is this the conclusion to be drawn from current circumstances and events. The "end" to which the title refers instead is the purpose, or *telos*, of democracy in our time. Whatever continuities there might be to that purpose in previous generations, however, democracy in the 21st century is increasingly exhibiting some radical discontinuities in terms of its forms and institutions. The times, like the climate, are a-changing; we cannot assume that what has "worked" before will continue to "work," or that the language we use will continue to mean the same things it has meant before—or that it will be used toward the same end.

Leaving the deconstruction of the problems to others, I want instead to suggest what will come to characterize differing aspects of 21st century democracy. Retrospective analysis will not help; we need to look beyond current circumstances in a trajectory toward the future instead of seeing ourselves primarily as inheritors of past choices and situations. The Occupy Movement lacked such a focus forward, leaving its members eventually to be evicted as a public nuisance or a community health hazard, regardless of the force of their logic or the validity of their protests. Without this focus forward, nothing changes for the better. When Martin Luther King chose to make his famous speech from the Lincoln Memorial characterizing the civil rights movement, he proclaimed, "I have a dream" instead of making the more obvious and defensible statement that, "We are living in a nightmare."

But to focus forward, we also need the appropriate language—without new words (or old words used in new ways), we are unable to think new thoughts. If, out of the shambles of the Thirty Years War and on the heels of the Treaty of Westphalia, Enlightenment thinkers were able to reformulate their thoughts and thus to create the society we have experienced for more than 350 years, we can do the same today.

The end or purpose of democracy in the 21st century will be shaped by certain realities that need to be incorporated into that focus forward. These need to be seen as realities to be managed, however, not as paralyzing catastrophes or insurmountable barriers.

There are three such realities to incorporate: the demise of the nation state; the failure of representational liberal democracy; and the radical impacts of resource insufficiency and climate change.

The cumulative effect of these three realities is, of course, the end of the status quo as we know it (or imagine it) to be. This is why there are discontinuities in the forms and institutions of democracy—and why the philosophy of democracy as it emerged from the Enlightenment needs to be rethought for the 21st century, if we wish to have a sustainable future.

THE DEMISE OF THE NATION STATE

Much ink has been spilled on the nature, origins and characteristics of the nation state that the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) either incorporated or implied. The key elements, however, were the integrity of borders and domestic autonomy—both political and economic—with the resulting security for the population that would allow them to go about their daily lives without interference from the outside. Borders were protected in part by the alliances that autonomous nation states formed, ensuring that inter-state conflicts had a balance in terms of the respective powers involved that would give pause to the casual depredations that continental affairs had long included. The state, however it was governed, had an identity that was both distinct and related to lines drawn on a map, regardless of the local implications for ethnicity or ecological topography.

The nation state had a much more clearly defined role in European contexts than it had in colonial ones, where local autonomy was casually superseded by imperial activities. However arbitrary the lines drawn on European maps might be, they were even more arbitrary when it came to dividing up the rest of the world into colonial territories of European powers. Economic activity was directly linked to the integrity of imperial as well as national borders, moreover, in that access to waterways and crucial natural resources became an object of strategy and competition. So, too, did access to colonial markets for the disposal of manufactured goods by the European imperial powers.

Any sense of real security derived from this system of checks and balances was erased by two world wars. Four empires were shattered and two more reduced to rubble in the Great War of 1914-18, leaving other empires to rise in ways that made the Second World War both inevitable and more catastrophic. If the technology of modern (and then nuclear) warfare made physical boundaries irrelevant to the integrity of the nation state, the development of a truly global economy made economic boundaries even more permeable. The end of the Cold War, combined with the entry of China into the global economy—and the parallel growth of global multi-national corporations—has rendered impossible any true economic autonomy for the individual nation state, however large or powerful it might otherwise appear to be. The capacity to destroy the planet might seem to be a desirable tool for wielding global power, but it has proven of little real value in determining the course of everyday economic or political activities.

Thus, it is fair to argue that the nation state, as conceived in the post-Westphalian period, has outlived its usefulness as a means of organizing political, economic or even military activity. It still serves a ceremonial function, a way of organizing international sporting competitions like the Olympics, or embodying regional history and heritage, but little more. Its power over its citizens is thus effectively illusory, continued only by the acquiescence of those citizens to the

forms and institutions of governance that they have accepted or to which they have accommodated. These forms and institutions, however, are inadequate to the needs of democracy in the 21st century and are thus on the cusp of significant change.

THE FAILURE OF LIBERAL REPRESENTATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The weakening of centralized, coercive control by the nation state is in fact another indicator pointing to its imminent demise. Consider the following premise: No government, however tyrannical, survives for long except by consent of the people. Whether it is demonstrated by the end of empires, totalitarian regimes, or military dictatorships—especially as the 21st century unfolds—coercive measures to retain control of government are doomed to eventual failure. As even the poorest countries in the South become cross-wired with cellphones, it has correspondingly become much more difficult to repress dissenting elements of the population (whether they are defined by geography, ethnicity or political allegiance). The propaganda behind such coercive efforts is now easily undermined by the general sharing of information on the internet that once could be controlled by the state.

While the most immediate examples to test the validity of such a premise come from countries, past and present, whose governments are anything but democratic, the same conclusion can also be reached for liberal democracies. It is the persistence of the forms and institutions of representational democracy that reflects the will of the people, not the individuals, political parties or particular governments that have assumed or been selected for leadership. It is the general acquiescence of the population that allows for the continuation of these forms, not legal, judicial or military coercion. (Considering the numbers of troops required by COIN theorists, there are not enough serving members of the Canadian Forces (in all branches of combat arms) to suppress an insurgency in my home city of Winnipeg, should it choose to rebel against the federal government.) It is troubling to realize, therefore, that in different circumstances, that such acquiescence could be withdrawn. If it is, then no amount of external influence, of whatever kind, would be enough to put Humpty back together again. The rapid, tragic—and permanent—disintegration of the former Yugoslavia should be evidence enough of the validity of this observation. In the year marking the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, moreover, the collapse of state capitalism in countries of the former Eastern bloc and the dismantling of the Soviet Union provide further evidence. So, too, the reunification of Germany against all obstacles demonstrates what happens when the actions of a government receive the active support of the people, not merely their acquiescence.

We need to recognize the fact that in Western democracies, where there are varying forms of representative government, it is not the success of such forms

and institutions that has enabled their continuation, but the tolerance of the people. If, instead, it is the general acquiescence of the population—regardless of the efficacy of their governments—that has enabled representational democracy to continue, we need to examine "the will of the people" if we want to assess the health of those forms and institutions. We also need to consider under what conditions that acquiescence might be withdrawn.

Note here, as well, that it is the acquiescence of the population that needs to be considered, not its active support. One need only measure the continuing decline in voter turnout for elections at all levels of government to realize that claiming the general population actively supports either the process or its outcome is a dubious conclusion. At best, they tolerate both, reluctant to opt for an alternative that could be even worse.

The argument here, however, is about the failure of representational democracy, not merely its inadequacies. Harking back to the aftermath of Westphalia, there are two general classes of countries to consider—colonial powers and their former colonies. The Enlightenment ideals of liberal democracy formulated by the representatives from those colonial powers are no longer considered universal truths about some natural condition of either individuals or their collectives. The cultural contexts in which these ideals were articulated have long since disappeared, supplanted by a global consumer culture these forebears would neither recognize nor approve. What is more, the forms and institutions of representational liberal democracy have had only marginal success in their transplantation to former colonies. Watching the rise and fall of democratic governance in too many countries in the global South confirms the idea that the Enlightenment version of liberal democracy is little more than a convenient veneer, disguising much less liberal activity by those who hold political power for the moment.

In western democracies, studies have repeatedly shown decline in voter turnout is matched by a generational disillusionment with the political process. Younger people are disproportionately inclined not to engage in politics at any level. Yet representational government only works if the general population feels those who are elected actually represent them in the levels of government to which they are elected. If representatives govern by their own lights, or in response to the influence of lobbies of one kind or another, then the form of democracy is played out, but not its content. If those elected are only infrequently accountable to the electorate, then the rest of the time they are seen to govern with essential impunity—and often do. If the occasional electoral accountability is undermined by fraud or distrust, or if the candidates effectively all represent a continuation of the same special interests and thus give the electorate no real choice or alternative, then the outcomes have the form of democracy but, again, none of its intended content. Add to this mix the evidence of corruption among elected officials, and the meme of "the crooked politician" damns all those who

hold public office—discouraging for the honest candidates who might run, and disheartening for the elected representatives who work for the greater good and not their own.

However inarticulate its proposals for change might have been, this kind of critique of the current political situation was repeated over and over again by participants—of all ages and stages—in the Occupy Movement. "We are the 99%" is in itself a devastating commentary on the failure of liberal democracy in the West, however carefully maintained the institutional façade might be. The people might have been evicted as public nuisances and community health hazards, but the sentiment underpinning the Occupy Movement continues to grow and the problems it identified to date remain unresolved.

In other countries, such as those that experienced the Arab Spring movements in its various forms, there is thus a double problem. Not only do the people, especially the young people, desire "democracy"—which perhaps could mean replacing their current method of governance—but the alternatives offered by Western democracies are seen not only to be colonial institutions, but ones that are failures in precisely the areas most important to these popular movements. Democracy understood as an expression of the will of the people, who actively participate in the decisions that lead to the future they want, does not easily fit into structures that are seen to work poorly, if at all, even in countries with a long history of democratic traditions. Add to this the necessity that effective democratic forms and institutions must be seen as *indigenous* expressions of the will of the people, and it is no surprise that former colonies can neither simply accept nor impose something from outside offered, however graciously, by their former colonial masters. The passion is there for a change toward whatever the people believe to be democracy, but the language and the institutions remain inadequate to the task. The pot continues to simmer and occasionally boils over, but there is no obvious resolution to these problems in places that tend to be referred to as "young" or "emerging" democracies.

Thus, it is fair to conclude that liberal, representational democracy that has evolved along the historical trajectory from the Treaty of Westphalia, through the Enlightenment to today, has failed—or at the very least cannot be adapted to the conditions and circumstances of the 21st century. There is a fundamental discontinuity between its forms and institutions, grounded in the Westphalian nation state, and those required for a sustainable future in a globalized society. Its persistence is not evidence of the active support of populations in "democratic" countries, moreover, but instead reflects the deterioration of such active support into the mere acquiescence, for the moment, of the majority.

This (often grudging) acquiescence, even in established democracies, is increasingly being challenged by the third reality: the radical impacts of resource insufficiency and climate change.

RESOURCE INSUFFICIENCY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

While arguments may be made at local levels about the success of liberal democratic processes, the utterly inadequate response of democratic governments to issues related to climate change represents failure of the highest order at national and international levels. We have not begun to process the implications of resource insufficiency, especially within the dynamics of a climate-changing world, and this has frightening implications—especially for populations who only acquiesce to the leadership offered by those individuals and governments who hold the reins of authority. If it is true that a rising tide lifts all boats, a tsunami will certainly swamp them—and we are living into a time when at least metaphorical tsunamis will likely become commonplace.

"Resource insufficiency" may seem a banal way to characterize the effects of crises to come, but when that resource is clean water to drink, or enough good water for crops to grow or for livestock to survive, it becomes critical. When the coastal waters are too polluted or too warm for the fish to survive close to shore where the fishers can catch the food they need, or when there is a lack of fuel for cooking or for transportation, there can be devastating consequences for health and well-being. Even when it is something as simple as a shortage of long grasses needed to thatch the roofs of huts in Maasai-land, there can be serious consequences for the stability of local communities When such problems appear at a rate faster than that to which local systems can adapt, these local systems are simply overwhelmed.

In small island states, the rising tides pose a serious threat as well as the hurricanes and typhoons that will become more frequent as extreme weather patterns related to climate change occur. Polar icecaps melting at a more rapid rate than models predicted will mean substantial increases in sea levels that simply submerge major population centers, as well. In other places, long-term drought linked with soil degradation from intensive (irrigated) agriculture and aquifer depletion, will turn current breadbaskets into dustbowls in places like the United States and China. With an ever-growing global population, this spells disaster, as food resources will be increasingly inadequate to feed the world.

Much more could be said (and has been said elsewhere). The point here is that governments, supposedly representative of the people, which fail to provide the necessities of life in local communities—whether as a result of some natural disaster or because of the long-term decline of resources—risk losing any remaining or potential support from the people who elect them. Moreover, any local social stability that is reliant on external supports also may become a casualty of climate change. Consider the highly criticized response, both local and federal, to the effects of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans—and contemplate what would happen if the coastal United States were hit by a series of hurricanes in one year, or spread over several years in succession. If Katrina is a measure of the meager

resilience of one of the world's wealthiest countries to natural disaster, just imagine the effects of worse storms in countries in the global south where significant areas and large numbers of people live at or below sea level.

There is a certain resignation, even stoicism, in communities devastated by natural disasters over which they have no control—and over which the government has no control, either. But as the predicted consequences of climate change are played out around the world—consequences that at least arguably might have been avoided had governments properly exercised their mandate "to serve and protect"—such resignation will be paired with growing anger. Especially when emergency response and longer term reconstruction services are overwhelmed—as could easily happen—the failure of governments-at-a-distance to predict the problems or provide for their solution will further increase such local anger. Local authorities that try to do what they can in the face of disaster will likely fair much better, however, both because of visible and immediate efforts to help and because they will be considered less culpable in terms of the larger issues around resource insufficiency and climate change than higher levels of government.

Moving beyond the disasters unfolding as a resulting of changing climate, there are those that are directly the consequence of human activities. The Westphalian system of nation states emerged from a long period of intractable and never-ending warfare. To a war-weary Europe, the appeal of territorial integrity and domestic autonomy superseded any reservations about revenge against their enemies. In a post-Westphalian system of international relations, however, neither territorial boundaries nor domestic autonomy will hold much weight if critical resources—such as water—are under threat. Whether the lines on the map are ever redrawn or not, it is possible both to undermine hostile governments through subversive activities and to leverage, by economic means, control over their resources and domestic policies that in previous times would have required an absolute victory over them in war.

Yet the interconnectedness entailed by a globalized society is paradoxically both the source of its resilience and strength, and the reason for its terrifying vulnerability. The more developed a region becomes, the less able are local areas to manage all the dimensions of what is required for a sustainable society. The interdependence of critical infrastructure and basic necessities with regions perhaps a significant distance away means that local failures (crops, water, employment) are mitigated by imports from away. On the other hand, it also means that events far away can have devastating consequences on communities that are unable to survive on their own without such imports.

This all conspires to mean that local politics, local concerns, local problems, have the potential to cause global effects—and therefore to engage the interests of players on a global stage who otherwise would never have noticed or cared what was going on. The resulting system complexity, much of it managed by global multinational cor-

porations rather than by nation states, makes conflict potentially into an instrument of corporate activity than a continuation of diplomacy by other means.

Historians have noted the longevity of corporations that survive the defeat in war of their host countries, just as they profit by their victories, because such corporate entities have none of the political or geographic constraints of nation states. In a globalized economy, this is unlikely to change, as mega-corporations have economic assets and activities that easily exceed those of many nation states and therefore act with impunity and according to their own interests.

Thus, if the 19th century was marked by the proxy conflicts of colonial powers and the 20th century by the proxy conflicts of ideological powers, resource insufficiency in the 21st century is likely to lead to the proxy conflicts of corporate powers. In this instance, as in the past examples, it is the interests of local communities in living toward a sustainable future that are most at risk. All three types of conflicts were (or could be) planned and executed in abstraction from the consequences on the ground—seeing what goes on, in effect, from 30,000 feet instead of it being up close and personal.

One could say that the first casualty of such conflicts is always democracy, rather than truth. Yet it is an ironic fact that despite the overwhelming power of the protagonists in each of the three scenarios, the conflict is enabled and prolonged only by the consent of the people. When the colonists objected, colonial empires disappeared; when the people grew weary of the ideologies that entailed perpetual conflict, they were rejected for new beliefs; when corporations focus more on their own interests than on those of the people who buy their products or services, the consumer makes other choices.

In a climate changing world, the risks of conflicts at any level, for any reasons that might have been persuasive in the past, are simply too great for the perpetuation of these conflicts to gain the long-term support of any population. With so many elements in a precarious balance around the world, any large-scale conflict could tip the balance and ensure global catastrophe. (For example, the more computer modeling was done of the concept of "nuclear winter," the less conflict it was realized would be required to initiate one.)

There will always be segments of society intent on fighting for their own selfish reasons and their own specific concerns, but if the voice of the majority is able to speak and be heard, perhaps for the first time in history it is possible for democracy to take on a new form and purpose that leads to global peace and security in the 21st century.

A FOCUS FORWARD

With the forgoing as prologue, I would like to suggest ways of characterizing aspects of democracy in the 21st century. In making the case for a discontinuity

between the Enlightenment/Westphalian heritage and the future, these three terms are offered as functional categories that allow for an assessment of democratic forms and institutions—in widely different circumstances—both as they are now and as they could become: subsistence; operational; and systemic. Each describes how and why the population acquiesces to forms and institutions of governance and under what conditions.

Subsistence democracy is currently the most common form of popular tolerance of whatever government might be in power. Whether local, regional or national; whether representational democracy, authoritarian state or warlord; whether Northern, Southern or somewhere in between; subsistence democracy is also the most tenuous state of popular tolerance of governance and thus the most easily disrupted.

As the word suggests, people tolerate the government that provides them with the bare necessities of life. Especially in an agrarian context, this entails not only allowing the small holder farmers to grow the crops they need to feed themselves, but the security required for them to harvest what is planted. Western liberal democracies where such security is taken for granted can lose sight of the importance of this dimension of community life. In part, subsistence democracy is about food and water; but in larger measure, popular tolerance of any government is related to the likelihood of a secure harvest and the chance to plant the next.

Thus, as long as the demands placed on the community for tangible support in the form of food, money and fodder for the military do not undermine its subsistence, people will acquiesce in and tolerate virtually any form of governance. Democratic ideals are well and good, but if there is no food and no prospect of a harvest, people are forced to leave their communities for somewhere else. The promise of local security is what promotes tolerance of whatever government there happens to be—but should that government fail to provide such security, tolerance of its leadership will instantly evaporate. Resentment can quickly morph into opposition, as people lose their fear of whatever other alternative form of governance might be possible. ("However bad Y might seem, it can't be any worse than X actually is.")

Thus, when we consider the apparent regional successes of organizations like Boko Haram or ISIL, it is not because the local populations have become ideologically aligned with either group. If they, unlike the previous regional governments, can provide what the people need for subsistence—and if opposition to them threatens such subsistence, because of the lack of outside security support—people will acquiesce in whatever forms and institutions of governance these groups require.

Such acquiescence, of course, is tenuous. Should the demands placed on the people become too much, should these groups fail to maintain the security they have promised, the people will just as readily accept whatever other form of governance is offered that fulfills their needs for subsistence.

In none of these examples is "support" an accurate term to describe the relationship between governors and governed. The tolerance of the people is relative to whatever base line of services and security the community has determined, by consensus, is sufficient for their subsistence. However minimal or marginal this base line might be, the alternatives for governance are either believed less likely to provide it or, out of ignorance, are simply feared to be worse.

Yet while it is relatively easy to identify subsistence democracy in developing countries, the concept is equally applicable to attitudes in representational democracies, Western and otherwise. The popular consensus may well be that the government is inefficient, corrupt, and anything but representative of the will of the people, but as long as the minimums of subsistence are met in local areas—or local areas are left alone to manage their own subsistence—these defects (and the government) are tolerated.

As societies become more developed, however, what constitutes subsistence also develops from food, water, shelter and security to harvest the crop to something more. Infrastructure becomes part of the equation, as does transportation, banking activities, employment, electricity, education, health care and some form of social assistance for those who, because of short-term circumstance, are unable to provide for themselves. Investment, both to make money in shorter term and toward some future retirement, becomes the equivalent touchstone to the smallholder farmer's need for harvest security in determining whether or not the current governors should be tolerated. Depending on the region, security from military threats is also part of what is required, and (at times) security threats may be used to fend off criticisms of governments failing to supply some of the other base line necessities.

Yet here again, the population does not necessarily support the government; it may be tolerated, or the people may acquiesce in what the government requires, but only because these base line necessities for subsistence are seen to be provided. Threaten or remove these necessities, and popular tolerance wears thin; demand too much from the population to enable the government, and people start to consider whether other alternative forms or institutions of governance might be more attractive. Fear of change can be overcome by fear of not having what, by consensus, the population has decided is necessary for survival.

The demise of the nation state and the failure of representational democracy have a direct impact on the prevalence of subsistence democracy today. If the nation state can no longer guarantee subsistence, however that is defined, and if the efforts of the people to elect representatives to form a government which (at a minimum) will provide such subsistence are frustrated by corruption or any other perceived problem with the electoral process, then the people's tolerance of the forms and institutions of such governance is tenuous and liable to shift if a viable alternative for subsistence is presented.

In all examples, subsistence democracy is thus distinct from any of the forms or institutions of liberal democracy. It may be correlated with them, but there is no causal relationship. If democracy is related to the will of the people, that will may be expressed in terms of tolerance of or acquiescence to governance of whatever kind provides or maintains the level of services and conditions the people consider necessary for subsistence. There is some limited dimension of coercion, but not of society as a whole—or the people would cease to tolerate the government, leading to a downward spiral into chaos, as more repression is met with further resistance.

This is why various initiatives to eliminate severe poverty, provide clean water and sanitation, and especially food security in developing countries, such as those reflected in the proposed post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, are crucial to a sustainable future. In the absence of any of these dimensions of subsistence, whatever other governing structures are in place ("democratic" or not), the will of the people will be in opposition to those who are in government.

Once there is a minimum level of subsistence, however that is achieved, the forms and institutions of governance again do not necessarily have to reflect those of Western liberal democracy for a particular region to function as a democracy. If the government, of whatever kind, is able to read the will or desire of the people and do what the majority wants beyond bare subsistence, there is a second, functional level of democracy that may be termed "operational."

This level of democracy moves beyond tolerance or acquiescence to active support. Yet that support, again, might only be correlated to the forms and institutions of representational democracy. As long as the government's decisions reflect the consensus of the majority, the people themselves handle dissent, through peer pressure and even vigilante-ism. In this instance, repression of dissent by government agents might be accepted by the general population, because the dissenters are seen to be going against the will of the community; the government thus becomes an agent of the people, dealing with those who object to what the people want.

How this "will of the people" is determined is an open question—and certainly it can be created or manipulated by means of propaganda that is generated through the various avenues that society provides, whether religious, racial, ethnic or ideological. Operational democracy therefore explains how populations can be mobilized to support actions of a government that is anything but democratic in terms of the forms and institutions of representative liberal democracy. If democracy is an expression of the will of the people, then at an operational level, we must accept that the will of the people can be something other than the ideals expressed in a liberal democratic tradition and yet still be "democratic."

With the demise of the nation state and the ensuing globalization of culture, it is possible to develop a global "will of the people," outside political, geographic

or cultural boundaries, which would lead to a worldwide operational democracy. That consensus would have to be broadly construed, so that people of every level of society could understand and agree with it, but communications technology could be used to achieve such a goal, if it were sufficiently important to transcend the other inevitable barriers that distance and difference create. The governments of individual regions or nation states might try to block or prevent such a consensus from developing, but such efforts would ultimately be futile were there a global initiative of sufficient importance to everyone.

Thus, people around the world could be brought to understand and accept the Enlightenment ideals of liberal democracy, but only if they are able to be expressed or conveyed in ways that do not also require acceptance of the forms and institutions of representational democracy, burdened by a colonial past and an ineffectual present. An operational democracy is not achieved, however, by means of some perpetual referenda on the daily decisions of government. Even in the electronic age and in well-wired cities, this would neither be timely nor practical. Yet any government that correctly gauges the will of the majority and makes its major decisions dependent on what it learns of that will—and not according to its historical or ideological agenda—will be functioning as a democracy as a result, regardless of the optics involved.

If "the end of democracy" is enabling the people as a whole to direct the major decisions that affect their lives, then the concept of operational democracy leads to the ironic possibility that a supposedly representational democracy might be governed in ways that are actually further from incorporating "the will of the people" into such decisions than one that, to outside eyes, resembles a dictatorship or oligarchy. Certainly, this was a large part of the rationale behind the Occupy Movement; such criticisms need to be taken seriously, because the assumption that current representational democracy is actually an operational democracy does not survive contact with the evidence—which is why voter turnout is dismal and public opinion of politicians and governments ranges from overt hostility to general dismay.

For both these concepts of subsistence democracy and operational democracy, however, the third reality—the radical impacts of resource insufficiency and climate change—has not yet been woven here into the 21st century picture. These issues separately and in combination will drive changes in governance that will create the discontinuity between post-Enlightenment ideals of liberal democracy and institutions and what will mark life around the world in the 21st century.

Subsistence democracy is effectively expressed at local levels—the ability of local governance to manage the basic needs of the community. Operational democracy will be the combination of communities, working toward an end to which the communities together have decided. Any higher level of government will thus effectively lead a community of communities—and, to remain func-

tional, will need to do what the consensus of those communities directs, however that consensus is formulated or communicated.

In a climate-changing world, plagued by resource insufficiency, moreover, such decisions and the communities that make them will not be divided along post-Westphalian lines on a map. Ecological topography, not political geography, will be become a determining factor, because managing resources (like water) only makes sense within the context of a specific watershed. To survive, communities within particular watersheds will need to resolve their other differences, or even subsistence will become impossible. Moreover, people within such a watershed will tolerate whatever systems of governance make subsistence possible, regardless of their form or institutional character.

In a crisis, people tend to support whatever works; perhaps the reason the current forms and institutions of liberal representative democracy are continued despite their flaws is that there has been no crisis sufficient to make otherwise tolerant (or fearful) people search for or accept some alternative. If the scenarios of potential climate-linked disasters take place as predicted, this situation may change dramatically. Once local communities, united by suffering, have to survive on their own and fend for themselves, the likelihood of some outside agency then subsequently imposing its will on these communities becomes vanishingly small—especially if the devastation and suffering can be linked to decisions made or avoided by governments from an earlier time.

The data about climate change and resource insufficiency is clear, even if specific predictions about outcomes are not. When the inevitable crises happen, governments that are only tolerated will quickly lose the acquiescence of communities that fall below the level of subsistence in crucial areas and are blamed either for failing to prevent the problem or for failing to plan for the contingency. Whatever community government emerges from the crisis, assuming the community survives, will reflect operational democracy regardless of the forms or institutions in which it is embodied.

DEMOCRACY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The third aspect of 21st century democracy is systemic democracy. As a way forward, it embodies both the needs of subsistence and operational democracy and adds a further dimension that current representational democracy pretends to embody, but which history and experience have demonstrated it actually does not.

Systemic democracy is an expression of the will of the people, moving upward from individuals into communities, into regions, nations and potentially into global society as a whole. It is driven by principles, not by forms or institutions, and fosters the web of relationships that a global society would need for a sustainable future.

What makes it possible is not the sentiment—the sentiment has long been present in the philosophy of democracy—but the potential means of its realization. Never before has truly global communication been possible between so many people, in so little time. What needs to be communicated is not information per se, but what was first communicated in fragments by sailors, travellers and other voyagers from earlier times that first established links between far-flung regions and peoples—the stories that bridge the inevitable gulf between cultures.

It is the story of democracy that has caught the imagination of people all over the world, leading to movements like Arab Spring, not the example of western democracy or of parliamentary government. This is why the cultural critique of such movements being examples of Western influence utterly misses the mark. There is no particular desire to adopt Western forms and institutions of representative democracy—but there is a desire to have individual voices heard and heeded in the decisions that the government makes about their future. Engagement and participation are found in stories of all kinds that survive from generation to generation. Across cultures, around the world and back into the distant past of every region, stories relate how individuals have come to understand their situation and make choices that determine their future.

The best stories thus are moral stories, stories that include characters with which everyone can identify, stories into which people can write themselves as characters. Moral stories embody principles, but they contextualize those principles in ways people can understand. They render intellectual concepts into community practice, explaining the "why" as well as the "what"—and demonstrating the "how."

In a systemic democracy, the relationships between government and people are reciprocal and dynamic, not hierarchical or static. Leaders emerge from the people because they represent the stories of the people, not because they run clever campaigns or persuade people to choose against their instincts.

In the same way that climate change and resource insufficiency in a globalized economy will break down the old political barriers, global stories will break down efforts to marginalize or isolate social and cultural groups in the interests of domination and control. Such stories, communicated between individuals and communities, have the potential to unite based on common experience rather than to divide based on old hostilities or disparities. Stories personalize a shared experience of being human in ways that cross all the boundaries of a post-colonial world, divided into North and South, West and East, and all stops in between.

Additionally, these stories do not establish a human world separate from the Earth. They are always relational, reflecting a pragmatic understanding of the interrelationships between people and animals, between people and the

natural world, and (usually) between people and some idea of the divine or Other—a force or power larger than and outside the human sphere.

As we live into a climate-changing future, the perils of believing we are somehow independent of or unaffected by the natural systems within which our lives are interwoven will become ever more painfully apparent. The post-Westphalian, Enlightenment philosophical and political system not only gave the world representative liberal democracy and its institutions—it also gave it the industrial, consumer culture that has contributed substantially to the planetary problems our generation and the next must address.

The Earth story, as many have depicted it, needs to be understood and retold to enable the global, collective response that is necessary to create a sustainable future for all the children of Earth—and not just the human ones. Systemic democracy, in effect, is the political expression of such a story, bringing all voices together to sing in a global chorus.

At this point, the argument that systemic democracy is "the end of democracy" in the 21st century might seem to be fading into the realm of fantasy—another place where stories, rather than facts, are important. After all, the political, social, cultural and ecological problems faced by our generation are concrete, not fantastical, and need equally concrete responses.

Interestingly, there is solid evidence of the appeal and increasing global importance of systemic democracy, though it is understood by another name. The desire for systemic democracy is increasingly manifested throughout the United Nations system, and in other domestic and international fora, in terms of the desire for "civil society engagement."

Whether it is in terms of the post-2015 agenda and the Sustainable Development goals; the annual meetings of the Conference of the Parties for the Framework Convention on Climate Change; the expanded global responsibilities of the United Nations Environment Programme; the High Level Political Forum in Sustainable Development; and so on, civil society engagement is high on the agenda. While what it means, how it should take place, or where it fits into an inter-governmental process are all still hotly debated, there is diminishing opposition to the idea that it is necessary for any of these global, intergovernmental processes to implement the programs and achieve the goals that are negotiated.

"Civil society engagement" is systemic democracy by another name. Civil society engagement means having the perspective of society beyond the government heard and considered—a sharing of collective wisdom that enables decisions to be made that are more likely to be seen to reflect the will of the people than the choices of a few would ever be. It does not make civil society spokespeople, however they are selected, into equals of the government representatives in these processes—but governments that ignore the wisdom of their

people risk making decisions that will not be supported by them, with potentially disastrous results for us all.*

This takes us back to the opening premise that no government, however tyrannical, survives for long except by the consent of the people. Arguments for and against democracy that focus on the forms and institutions of Western liberal representative democracy miss this point. Any government that does not discern the will of the people—and heed the will of the people in the decisions it makes—is living on borrowed time, regardless of the structures of governance it maintains.

It is not enough to have the acquiescence of the people, either by fear of some alternative or by holding them hostage to the necessities of subsistence. Nor is it possible to dodge the truth of this premise by using some promise of other worldly reward through the manipulations of religion or ideology to encourage people to act against their better instincts and communal judgment. Manipulating religious belief systems for political advantage, like armed troops on every street corner, only suppresses the inevitable and in the end makes the rejection of such coercive measures that much more violent.

To return again to the reality of resource insufficiency and climate change, we are on the precipice of serious challenges to the stability of global society. Some geographical areas might be in more imminent danger than others, but the uncertainty of where and how (but not whether) these challenges will appear unfortunately makes specific preparations difficult. The largest challenge in the aftermath of any natural disaster—local, regional and global—will be to the resilience of the people and their systems of governance. Acquiescence and tolerance will not be enough; active support and engagement of the local communities, separately and jointly, will be crucial for survival.

"Resource insufficiency," however, speaks to other system problems than those caused by natural disaster. Managing this problem is at the core of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the goals still being negotiated. Sustainable development, however defined, must involve the guarantee of sub-

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* As a Regional Major Groups and Stakeholders Representative for North America to UNEP, I have been privileged to be involved in discussions around a new civil society policy and engagement mechanism for the United Nations Environment Programme over the past two years. I have witnessed and participated in the negotiations at the 27th Governing Council meeting (2013) and at the first United Nations Environment Assembly (2014), and consulted with colleagues involved in the other UN processes. Progress is being made on all fronts toward substantive engagement with civil society, while leaving the final decision-making in the hands of the nation states involved. This is particularly important at a local level, where civil society organizations are overwhelmingly responsible for the implementation of government or UN sponsored programs relating to ecology and sustainable development.

sistence for people in all areas of the world and the promise of a future better than the present circumstances in which they struggle. The dilemma, of course, is that on a finite planet whose resources are being stretched, if not over-consumed, such essential development in some areas requires a rethinking and reworking of lifestyle in others.

At the heart of global, systemic democracy is the belief that all human life is of equal value; the goal might be to ensure an equal voice for all in the decisions that are made, but such a voice begins with the recognition of human equality beyond any distinctions of gender, race, ethnicity, religion or ideology. Problems multiply the moment the idea of systemic democracy is shouldered aside by the assumption that some group—any group—is of more value than another.

In our current situation, it might seem impossible to achieve the sustainable development goals, but we have not begun to harness the energy, wealth and ingenuity of a global population in such an effort. Without that effort, and the wisdom of all the people combined to generate the changes that are necessary, the future is grim beyond description.

Thus, the *telos* or end of democracy is to create a sustainable future, not just for a few or any category of elite, but for all people. The post-Westphalian, Enlightenment thinkers invented, debated and created a society that they thought would never again lead them back into the morass of internecine European warfare. On their own terms, they were successful, but the principles underpinning that society led to imperialism, colonialism, and industrial consumerism—and embedded racism, inequality and injustice in its structures.

Revolution was also at its core. Leaders of all kinds were forcibly reminded to consider the will of the people, lest in dismissing them to eat cake, they, too, lost their heads. Yet even throughout this history, it was the story of democracy—liberal democracy—that drove the changes and development of European society, not its forms and institutions. It was not until that period after World War II that universal suffrage became the norm, and arguably some time after that before Western societies could even gingerly accept the label of being "liberal" in their attitudes and policies. The story persuaded and inspired, even as the evidence discounted its current acceptance, effectiveness or value.

In the same way, the story of a sustainable future, in which people are equal in value and opportunity as well as equal in voice, is easily disputed. It would take little to create a litany of objections, reasons why such a sustainable future is impractical or impossible, supported by an arsenal of evidence. Yet as a means of mobilizing a global community, threatened by common problems and united through global communications technology, such a story is one within which we all may find characters we recognize and a role that we can play.

"Liberté, Equalité, Fraternité" made a powerful statement and was a wonderful battle cry to unite people in a common cause—even if the resulting forms and institutions were far from making such sentiments concrete in the lives of

the people of France. The Declaration of Independence had equally high-minded principles that, after more than two centuries, are still not enacted in the lives of many Americans. For both, the revolution was born and transmitted through story in ways that caught the imagination and gained the allegiance of large groups of people who could not have been mobilized together in any other way.

If "the end of democracy" in the 21st century is to enable people to choose their own future, from local communities to a globalized society, it needs a story to lead the way. That story must be an Earth story, one that can communicate what is possible when the voice of the people, everywhere, is heard and heeded by those who make decisions on their behalf. That story must hold all leaders to account, just as it impels individuals to make choices that shape their daily lives in a sustainable direction.

Creating that story requires thinking through the philosophy of democracy in our time, finding the language to guide the thoughts of a global population, just as it requires others to generate the passion to guide our hearts, toward a future that is sustainable for all of the children of Earth.